

America he jumped at the opportunity. The promoters of the tour simply wished to advertise *Patience*, but Wilde regarded the invitation as a tribute to his poetry.

He sailed early in 1882, expressed himself as disappointed with the Atlantic Ocean, and on arrival in New York said: "I have nothing to declare except my genius." The tour was a moderate success. With a few hundred pounds to his credit, he cut his hair, changed the fashion of his clothes to that of a dandy, and settled for a short period in Paris, where he wrote a pseudo-Shakespearean blank verse tragedy entitled *The Di4ches\$ of Padua* and commenced his poem *The Sphinx*, which has unfortunately influenced many recent poets, notably Flecker. His money quickly ran out and he again had to lecture, this time in the English provinces, where he repeated, with as good a grace as possible, his American lectures.

In 1884 he married Constance Mary Uoyd, the daughter of a well-known banister. His wife had a small income and they were able to take a house—16 Tite Street, Chelsea. They had two children, both boys, the first born in 1885, the second in 1886. For three or four years after his marriage Wilde wrote book reviews for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, articles on the theatre for *The Dramatic Review*, and talked. Every year his conversational powers had increased and by the middle eighties he was known throughout London society as the best talker of his time. He was invited everywhere and expected to keep "the table on a roar." His sayings went from mouth to mouth and were repeated in the papers. Wit, humour, and fable poured from him and held his hearers spell-bound. Many men have tried to describe the astonishing variety of his impromptu speech. It was not like the talk of a Johnson, a Coleridge, a Carlyle. He never monopolized the conversation. He always adapted himself to his company. He could amuse, interest, or charm according to the mood, the capacity, or the need of his audience. A bout of repartee came as easily to him as a fairy story or a humorous improvisation. He would mingle paradox with poetry, fun with fantasy, and myth with mimicry. From William Morris to Bernard Shaw, all the famous men of Wilde's time, as well as English, have paid tribute to the magic of his personality, the wit and fertility of his discourse. As a conversationalist, if not as a talker, there is no record of his equal.

***8.8**